

Top priorities for NSW's next minister for the arts

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Following the [resignation of the New South Wales arts minister](#) due to his infringements of COVID19 public health laws, NAVA outlines the key priorities facing the incoming minister.

MEDIA RELEASE

"There's never been a more critical time to be NSW's minister for the arts – nor a more impactful one," said Esther Anatolitis, Executive Director of NAVA. "There is so much good work to be done right now, so I very much look forward to welcoming NSW's new arts minister.

"Firstly, NSW is one of the only governments in Australia or indeed the world not to have made announcements on the steps they're taking to support the creative industries during the biggest disruption to our cultural life the state has ever seen.

"The NSW arts, screen and cultural industry [contributes \\$16.4bn to Gross State Product and employs over 118,000 full-time-equivalent workers](#). That's 3% of the entire state's economy. Such significant industry impacts demand dedicated focus at this time – and yet, even though the NSW arts industry is the biggest in Australia, we have heard nothing from the outgoing minister on how the state will redress the impacts of COVID19. Meanwhile, [millions are being invested](#) by states and territories across Australia.

"This week the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that, [as a direct result of COVID19, only 47% of Australia's arts and recreation businesses remain trading](#). With most artists, artswomen and organisations [unable to benefit from federal government income support measures announced to date](#), the state has a critical responsibility to prevent the collapse of the NSW arts industry. It's a tough ask for a newcomer to the role, but at the same time, it's an

opportunity of monumental scale to think confidently about the galleries, museums, venues, festivals and experiences for which NSW is renowned all over the world.

“An industry package that invests ambitiously in key organisations, relieves publicly supported companies of their rent and reporting burdens, and provides valuable opportunities for artmaking, will be vital. After all, that’s what we’re all craving in lockdown – and once we emerge, we’ll want our state’s artists and creative companies strong and ready to greet us into the new world. As well as attracting tourism to our regions and cities.

“Following last week’s announcements of the recent Australia Council Four Year Funding and Visual Arts & Crafts Strategy outcome, NSW is also about to make multi-year funding announcements. Those federal announcements [resulted in a loss for NSW](#) with fewer companies funded, imperilling some of our most beloved galleries and festivals.

“The Australian Design Centre [has warned](#) of the need “to address this urgently before our sector collapses, our culture suffers and more employment opportunities for artists and arts workers are lost.” [Artspace has also shared its concerns](#) for the future of its staff and the industry.

“Unlike what’s been possible for the Australia Council, the opportunity still exists for NSW to invest with responsible foresight in a larger, not a smaller, set of creative companies, and at greater levels of funding. For every \$1 invested in arts and culture, \$1.88 is generated for the NSW economy – that’s a great investment. That’s exactly the kind of multiplier we need to invest in right now: one that inspires the state as well as growing the economy.

“While ensuring the industry survives and thrives through this emergency is the obvious priority, there are a number of other priorities awaiting the attention of the new minister.

“These include investing in frameworks for First Nations self-determination; restoring the state’s nightlife post-lockdown and post-lockout; and resolving the debilitating and very expensive delays to infrastructure projects such as the Walsh Bay arts precinct, whose cost burden is being borne by arts organisations in limbo over their future accommodation.

“The new minister will also need to work hard to ensure that NSW is able to retain creative talent. The NSW Government spend on arts and cultural activity is lower than other comparable state governments: only \$18 per capita, compared to Victoria’s \$22.90 and Queensland’s \$33.80. Despite turning every dollar invested into \$1.88 for the state,

the NSW arts and cultural budget represents only 0.9% of the state's budget, [based on 2016/17 figures assessed by PWC](#).

“This low investment means our artists and organisations are neglected, especially regionally. NSW is the only state in Australia – and again, one of the only government arts agencies in the world – [not to offer a competitive grants program dedicated to artists](#). Instead, artists are expected to compete with organisations and their bids for project or infrastructure funding. While only a small proportion of the arts ever receives government funding, those that do are able to take exciting new risks and reach new audiences. And that's something that enriches all of our lives.

“Another priority will be the Powerhouse Museum. Does it still make sense to devote [a billion of the state's dollars](#) to the relocation of a world heritage 26-ton locomotive plus the rest of the museum's important collection, when we could instead imagine a cultural institution that's truly of and by Western Sydney? COVID19 austerity aside, the new minister will need to assess this decision carefully.

“Finally, restoring the respect of the industry will also be an immediate challenge for the new minister. Aside from the recent lack of focus on urgent matters, the outgoing minister has concerned the industry for some time with [multiple instances of public funds redirection without explanation](#) – even after competitive grant rounds had been assessed.

“The NSW arts industry stands ready to welcome and work closely with the new minister. We've got immediate challenges that, right now, seem insurmountable. With considered, ambitious leadership, the new minister can ensure that NSW leads the way in safeguarding and championing our artists, our organisations – and indeed, our cultural life.”